

SATURDAY, MAY 8, 1869.

Subject: Human Ideas of God.

# PLYMOUTH PULPIT:

A Weekly Publication

OF

## SERMONS

PREACHED BY

### HENRY WARD BEECHER.



NEW-YORK:

J. B. FORD & CO., 39 PARK ROW.

1869.

AMERICAN NEWS COMPANY, AGENTS FOR THE TRADE.

European Agents, SAMPSON LOW, SON & MARSTON, Crown Buildings, 188, Fleet Street, London.

Sold by all Carriers and News Dealers.

Brooklyn, January, 1869.

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*Gentlemen: Mr. T. J. Ellinwood has been the reporter of my sermons for some ten years; and he is the only authorized reporter of them. The sermons which you are printing, week by week, from his hand, are published by you alone, and are the only ones which go before the public with my consent.*

*HENRY WARD BEECHER.*

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## PLYMOUTH PULPIT.

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ANY BACK NUMBERS CAN BE FURNISHED.

# HUMAN IDEAS OF GOD.

SUNDAY MORNING, APRIL 25, 1869.

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"THY will be done."—MATT. x. 6.

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THIS short sentence, compassed by a breath, comes from the lips of child and man as if it were the easiest of all utterances, as well as the easiest of all commands. But he who sails in this sentence must have a deep channel. Its keel reaches far below the surface. He who can, in contemplative hours, say, "Thy will be done," is happy; but happier far he who can still repeat it in the struggling experiences of daily practical life. It is implied in this sentence that one has such a view of the divine character as shall command the soul's confidence and homage. It is impossible for one cheerfully and willingly, having begun with the opening sentence, "Our Father which art in heaven," to go on and say, "Thy will be done," except upon the supposition that God's will is, to the one that utters it, the best, the noblest consummation.

If God were what mythologists taught their deities to be who worshipped them, if Jehovah's attributes were but the transfer of men's selfish passions, then a good man could not say, "Thy will be done." If we are taught such notions of the divine administration as controvert the fundamental ideas of morality among men, the fundamental ideas of justice, of mercy and of goodness, it is quite in vain to teach us to say, "Thy will be done." A man must be untrue to his own moral convictions, who can say to a God that violates his ideas of sanctity and divine excellence, "Reign, rule." There must be presented to the human soul a deity that is better than man, in each and in every respect—so much better that it shall seem an infinite and unspeakable blessing that such a God should control all things, and should constrain men to become like himself.



There are many who rebuke such a use of reason as this as irreverent ; as presumptuous ; as setting man's judgment above God's ; as the result of carnal and unsubdued hearts. When men find fault with the character of God as it is taught to them, sometimes the answer is, "It is your unsubdued and carnal nature that contests God." We are taught that the natural heart is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be ; and therefore men think that when men resent certain views of the divine character and economy, it is part and parcel of their general depravity ; and it may be. It is true, often, that it is. Men may, and often do, refuse to accept God's character and government because their moral sense is darkened ; because they prefer darkness to light. But it does not follow that all do so. That does not determine, certainly, the case of earnest, conscientious, and self-denying persons, who are repelled by the teachings of the pulpit concerning God, and who contest false representations, as they think.

The reason was given to man for use, and not to be hidden in a napkin ; and if there be any other use so noble to which it can be put as that of searching out the necessary character of the supreme being, I know not what it is. There is nothing that goes so far to determine the average character of any community as its notions respecting God. There is nothing that goes down into the household so far, nothing that determines questions of right and wrong with such critical tests, as our ideas of what are the constituent elements of morality inherent in the nature of God. And what is divine government determines largely what is right government everywhere. And in human governments, the questions of right and wrong, liberty or oppression, are derived very largely from the theology of the periods in which men live. It is true that the reverse operation is going on, and that men's ideas, evolved by actual experience, form, first secretly, but afterward openly and more apparently, their notions of theology. There is an action and reaction.

It may be that we use our reason wrongly. Men may be hasty in their conclusions. They may reason foolishly. That does not touch the primary duty of employing their reason to explore and determine the true nature of God.

For the reason is to the mind what the eye is to the body. And the eye, too, may be used wrongly. Men may measure wrongly. They may judge wrongly of distances, of quality, of quantity, and of proportion. And yet, shall we say that the eye had better be put out ? There stand many men pointing to the great defects which men have shown in the use of reason as applied to religion, and say, "It is not safe for men to trust their judgment on holy things." They point to all the long line of mistakes made in respect to the in-

terpretation of God, his nature and government, and say, "The reason ought to be subordinated to the church. Men should not hastily employ their individual reason on these tremendous interests." On the same ground you might say, "Men shall not employ their eyes, either;" for men make as many mistakes with their eyes as with their reason. Shall we have a guide, therefore, to go with us? Shall we get some church or corporation to appoint men that have a sort of prescriptive right to see for other folks, and tell us not to use our eyes because we sometimes make mistakes? We make mistakes with every faculty. The liability to err in any faculty is no reason for suppressing that faculty. Men had better become idiots. Indeed, when they take that ground, they are not far from it!

The whole Bible, on the other hand, is a generous and continuous appeal to reason. If this be the Word of God, we have a right to demand that it shall be in essential conformity with the constitution of human nature; with the constitution of the civil and secular world. It is; and in nothing more than this—the generous and continuous appeal which it makes to the use of reason in determining the character of God. Men are blamed because they worship heathen gods. Why? Because their reason should tell them better. Men are blamed if the glory of God does not shine bright on them. Why? Because they will not ponder; because they will not think. Men are blamed for their very vices. Why? Because, as the apostle declares, the Godhead, even where he is not revealed by special revelation, may be known by the things which are made. His eternal power and Godhead—that is, nature—speaks enough of God to teach men what are the great elementary principles of a real divinity. So that they are without excuse.

But it is asked, "Shall an immortal creature, before he will say, 'Lord, rule over me; let thy will be done,' presume to arraign God before the tribunal of his petty understanding? And shall he review his nature? Is it not better, more fitting, that he should humble himself, and that he should accept the divine nature?"

This sounds very prettily in language; but in practice it is stupidity. How shall the divine nature be understood at all except by the use of the reason? Suppose a priest tells you what is God's nature, do not you accept it at his hands by using your reason? Why not use it before, and accept it at the hand of revelation, by using reason upon the material that it gives to you? Why does God himself present his attributes, his character, and his government, to the human understanding, if it is an evil or a sin to employ our feeble minds upon them? We are fairly provoked to it in the Word of God. We are challenged by every form of appeal to ponder the character of God. By every mental stimulant we are provoked to it.



The Bible is itself a standing answer to all who think it presumptuous for men to reason about God, or who teach that they are to take the current ideas of divinity without reason and without protest. It is wholesome for a man to discriminate, and demand before he worships that there be that presented to his mind which is worshipful.

But it is said, "We must accept implicitly what the Scriptures teach; and for us to employ our reason to sit in judgment on the Scriptures, and determine whether they ought to teach, or ought not to teach, this or that doctrine, is monstrously culpable. We should accept what the Scriptures teach." So hold I. But what *do* they teach? That is the very question. On that point people and learned men in different ages have differed—differed according to the mental philosophy of their age; differed according to the prevalent ideas of government that shape their reading of the Bible; differed according to the dominant codes of morality and theology under which they have been educated. It has been so; it must always be so. There is no help for it. But upon the whole, the ideas of God are growing by this very difference; by the controversies which it leads to; by the general progress of civility. And with this favorable element, the conceptions of God's nature are growing higher, nobler, more purely derived from the moral sentiments, more and more cleansed from all the taint of men's passions.

It is true that God's nature never changes; but man's conception of it changes. It is true that God does not grow; but human ideas of God grow. And the earlier developments without a revelation, and indeed the earlier interpretations of the revelation of God, were largely infused with elements which sprang from man's passional nature. In the progress of civilization, in the development of the household, and, above all, in the more perfect working out of the New Testament spirit, man has become such in his moral nature that he gets a better conception of God, and cleanses his old notion.

A single other thought. It is impossible to separate the fundamental ideas of the perfect human character from the ideas of divine rectitude. You can not have two moralities. You can not have two styles of character, one founded on one kind of morality, and another upon another. That which is right in God is right in man. That which is not right in man is not right in God. You can not confound things without utter destruction to a man's reason and moral sense, by saying that things which it would be fundamentally wrong for a creature to do, would be right for God to do. If lying is wicked in man, it is even more wicked in God. If it be man's duty to maintain fidelity to word and pledge, still more intensely is it morally obligatory that a superior Being should. As you go up in the scale of being, you do not get liberty of passion, but you get circumscription

of passion, and a larger moral obligation in a man. It is sometimes said that such and such courses would be unspeakably cruel in men; but that God is the Judge of the whole earth, and whatever he does is right. It is not so. A thing that is essentially cruel among men, becomes essentially cruel, under the same circumstances and in the same light, if performed by God. Self-laudation—is it hateful among men? Then it is hateful in God. Pride—is it forbidden to man? That kind of pride which is forbidden to man is forbidden to God. Self-seeking—if it is wrong for you, it is wrong for God. If it is wrong for you to seek your own glory, then it is wrong for God to be a seeker of his own glory. If it is wrong for men to go about coveting each other's praises, it is no more right because the being that does it sits in the supreme centre of authority. Essentially there must be but one and the same kind of attributes for the Christian character and for the Christ—for devout men upon earth, and for the God that inspires that devotion. There is to be moral unity everywhere.

Any other view than this introduces infinite confusion. Hence any teaching of God that contravenes the world's sterling notions of morality will make it impossible to say, "Thy will be done." If there be a style of theology that shocks the moral sensibility, that overthrows the ordinary deductions of conscience, that throws the ordinary sentiments of honor, and truth, and fidelity into disgrace, it will make it impossible that any one should worship God. No man can worship except by the consent of his understanding, by the consent of his moral nature, by the consent of his heart and affections; and it makes all the difference in the world, in leading men to worship God, what is the God that you frame and present to them for worship. For if he be not beautiful, men will not admire. If he be not attractive, men will not be drawn toward him. If he be not worthy, men will not applaud.

When, therefore, men—using, it may be, the language of Scripture, and not taking it out of its figurative sense, or giving it a larger interpretation than its mere literal one—have taught us that God lives for his own glory, how many hearts have turned away! Not even the fear of being lost could compel them to worship a Supreme Being who sat seeking that which he utterly forbids us to seek—his own selfish glory. To teach that God has a right to do as he pleases—unless he pleases to do benevolently—is to teach a view of God which can not but affront the moral understanding. The Bible does not teach it. Why should men, following a mere literal interpretation of certain phrases, set aside the ground of revelation, which is that God, in following the great ends of benevolence, acts as he pleases in the selection of instruments? Why should the administration of God be carried back as a part of his abstract character, and men teach that because he employs such men, such instruments, and such times as he pleases, to



carry out his works of wisdom and benevolence, therefore he is a being that has a right to do as he pleases in the abstract and universal sense of that term?

The New Testament educates men to the knowledge of virtue, of honor, of fidelity. The New Testament contains a schedule of morality and piety for the individual, for the household, and for the civil estate; and it purports to educate men thereby, that they may become like God. And if the educated moral sense is offended, no man can say, "Thy will be done."

The moral sense of a Christian community, therefore, becomes at last a fair tribunal, and furnishes *criteria* of interpretation. The moral sentiment of a truly intelligent, educated Christian community is one before which theology itself must be tried. It is true that theology goes before in the order of time; but it is just as true that by and by theology itself has to go back to that community which it has instructed, and has itself to be tried by that very conscience which in part it has itself formed. I will not say that the everlasting God is tried before the moral sense of the community; but I will say that *men's ideas of God* are on trial before the moral sense of the community in which they live: and that a community where men are virtuous, and pure, and benevolent, and are laboring by all the power of their understanding, and of their wealth, to do good in society, has in it a *criterion*, in their moral sense, by which to judge of God's moral character and administration which is presented to them for their worship and for their obedience.

If, therefore, it be taught that God has a right to control all things by his will, simply because he has the power, it is to authenticate moral despotism. Such a view of God has prevailed. Men have taught that God had a right to rule, simply because he was the strongest. It is true that the wisest, the best, and the strongest must take precedence. It is true, therefore, that God has a right to reign in heaven and on earth—everywhere—but not because he has power to reign. It is true that when you see the use that God makes of his power, you can not help following with those that in the apocalyptic vision worshiped his power, and acclaimed praise to it; but when you look at the question narrowly, and reduce it to its basis, no being in heaven or on earth has a right to reign, simply because he has power. Right goes with moral quality. If God's conscience is pure, and supreme over all consciences; if God's moral sentiments are themselves the very fountains from which our moral sentiments flow; if his wisdom is supreme and unerring; if his love is broader, deeper, higher, wider, and more full of bounty than any other love, these qualities raise him to supremacy. But the mere fact that God made men, is no more an argument that he owns them, than is the fact that



I have children an argument that I own them. I have obligations to rear them; but when they come to man's estate, is the mere fact of paternity a reason why I may wring their necks off, or why I may make a slave of one, and put one in hateful preference over another? Paternity gives no one a right to set at naught the great moral distinctions which love and conscience have established in the world. It does not among men, and still less does it in God. Those doctrines, therefore, are inconsistent with a cheerful reliance upon the will of God, which have taught that God had a right to reign simply because he had power to do it; that we had no business to question that divine power; and that, when men set up their images of ideas, their idols of teaching, saying "This is God," if men questioned them, they questioned the real God because they questioned these theoretic gods. And this idea that God had a right to reign simply because he was able to do it, would be despotism in heaven as much more hateful than despotism is upon earth, as the sphere is broader, and the Being wiser and more comprehensive.

God's wisdom, God's justice, God's truth, God's love, God's fidelity—these give him—shall I say right?—*necessity*, to reign. These exalt him, and on these stand the throne of the universe.

It is thought by many that God seeks his own glory, and demands the universe to become courtiers. But the figurative language of Scripture, which is borrowed from courts, is not to us what it was to those to whom it first came. It is transferred to us without losing its bad flavor—especially the idea that God sits in heaven, and that heaven is for the most part a great singing-school, and that every body stands about the great white throne, and sings, and sings, and sings. And people wonder what they do when they are not singing. And it seems, judging from the theological notions on that subject, as though there was almost nothing else for them to do. And by and by there come doubts creeping into men's minds. And the child, when he begins to reflect, says, "What is the reason my father will not let me be praised, while it is taught that God sits in the centre of universal flattery, and is praised, and likes it, and angel bands, perpetually, night and day, praise him?"

Tell that child the truth, and heaven becomes a very different place. Say to him, "Love is always triumphant; love always breaks out into admiration; happiness is ecstatic, and seeks expression; heaven is the place of supreme happiness; and God's character is the most beautiful, and most gentle, and most amiable, as well as the most supernal and glorious of any character in the universe." And as, when the household gather together on Thanksgiving or Christmas day, the children coming back to the old homestead, and see their venerable father and mother, they have such a sense of their virtues

and excellences that they give expression to overflowing congratulations, and feelings of love and joy; so in this sense it is that angels are forever praising God in heaven. It is certainly not the praise of courtiers, nor of a great white row of angels that foolish painters represent as standing like so many candles, in candelabra; or like so many stalagmites or stalactites in a cave. Not that. But in the infinite liberty of the heart, in the infinite joy of every man's soul, in the perfect satisfaction of taste, and sympathy, and conscience, and love, in the blessedness of a character that touches and fills every faculty, men give their feelings expression, every one just as he wills—the artist in his way; the orator in his way; the woman according to her way; the man according to his way; the child in its way; the enthusiastic in their way; the thoughtful in their way. Every heart has liberty of love; and love is the highest praise; and the expression of it is the highest worship. And you may depend upon it that the stately notions which have found their way into some of our books will be quite banished out of heaven.

If, therefore, it be taught that God sits in heaven, and is the joyful recipient of infinite flatteries on every side, though it is very wicked for us to be flattered, what are you going to do with the history of Nebuchadnezzar, who one morning looked out on Babylon, and said, "Is not this great Babylon that I have builded for the house of my kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?" and who, because he towered up in that arrogant self-consciousness, was smitten down and sent to grass? Shall we be taught that, after hurling his bolt of judgment upon that proud oriental monarch for his arrogance, God may stand and look over the battlements of heaven, and say, "Is not this great Jerusalem that I have builded for my honor and power, and for the glory of my name," and that this is perfectly right in the New Jerusalem, though it was detestable in the old, or in the neighboring cities of it! There must be congruity of representations, or the mind can never say, "Thy will be done."

If it be taught again, that God supervises and punishes his creatures needlessly; if it be taught that God prepares this world as a vast trap; that he without their consent, and, without any reason of either good or evil beforehand, through weary centuries, pours myriad hordes of men into a dark world, where they stagger without knowledge and light, and forever and forever damns them because they act according to their circumstances—if this be the teaching in respect to God, can any man look up into his face, and say, "Thy will be done"?

Oh! it is calling for a perpetuated hell upon earth. It is calling



for the continuous march of a cruelty more unfathomable and unutterable than can elsewhere find any expression.

And if it be taught that God points out the laws which shall govern men in the way of duty, and that then, by secret decrees, he undermines those laws; if God says to men, "Do this and live," and then withholds the power to do it, and they die because they have no power; if he lays commands on men that transcend their ability, and then punishes them because they do not do what they can not do; if any of that hideous, dismal phantasmagoria be taught that sprang from the nightmare periods of theology, that makes God a Juggernaut tyrant, and life a snare, and the welfare of countless myriads no more to him than are the rats that the terrier kills in the pit in New-York to the ugly owner of the pit; if it be taught that God does such things as these, can you accept him, and say, "Thy will be done"? Can you take the palpitating hearts of men and women, and look at them as they swarm in Africa and Asia, and have been swarming since time began—myriads; more than the drops that pour down over Niagara Falls, day and night through the year—can you take them, and think that God is trifling with them, and playing experiments with them, and then look up into the face of such a hideous Being, and say, "Thy will be done"?

Oh! there must be more in God, or we can not worship him. Life itself is bad enough; it is dark enough; the problems that we meet are inexplicable enough—those practical problems; those "whys" that come staggering down the dark ways of human experience. Why such tears? Why such ignorance? Why such lustful cruelties? Why such misfortunes? Why such hideous poverty? Why such a creation groaning and travailing in pain until now? And all the alleviation that a man can get is this, that evil has a mission better than we think, and an outcome and ministration that shall in the end work out a better condition—a salvation truly glorious.

And if you add to the difficulty by taking these demoniac elements and putting them into God, enshrining them in the divine nature, and then demand, "This is God; now say, 'Thy will be done,'" I had rather die. I *should* die. I could not do it. I can say to love, "Wear the crown." I can say to wisdom, working out the counsels of love, "Reign." And I can say to power, whether it reverberates in the thunder, whether it rolls in war, whether it manifests itself on the scale of nations or in the minuteness of individual life, if it is working according to the counsels of infinite wisdom and infinite love, "Reign—reign." Four score years? It is cheap for immortality, to suffer four score years, if it is needful in order that the human family may develop step by step the higher and nobler traits which belong to their nature. And though life be one vast, multiplex

pang, if men are to be born into virtue, as they are born into the world, by cries and tears, and I know that it is supervised by a God who is working out of things final praise and glory and happiness, I can say, "Reign on—*reign on*." But if the world is one vast Juggernaut, and God's decrees are thundering on, and the vast wheels of nature and of life are rolling over myriads of men, and the pathway of decrees is blood, *blood*, BLOOD, how can I worship? How can I take the lessons that Christ taught me? How can I read such words as these: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth"?

Do not be afraid to bow before Jesus. O that cross!—blessed be God, it is the enfranchisement of theology. It stands up against heaven to say, "God, with his infinite power, is not cruel. God is the sufferer, and not one that makes suffering." The divine nature is not one that oppresses races, as the cluster is pressed, that the wine may flow out into the vintner's cup. The testimony of Christ's life, and the mission of Christ's death, and that everlasting love that streams from the cross of Christ is, "God so loved the world." Loved it? No mother ever loved her child half so much. And yet, what mother is there that did not in her small, feeble way, symbolize the whole atonement of Christ? What mother is there that did not bring forth her child with pangs, and strong crying, and tears? What mother is there that did not take the utter helplessness of the little babe for weeks and months, and give her life for it? How she gives up her sleep; how she gives up her heart's desires; how she foregoes pleasure; how she withdraws herself from society; how she gives the whole royalty of her rich nature to that little child that can neither speak, nor think, nor know what helps it! And then through what sickness does she watch! And with what labor and pain does she develop the child! And how does she bring it finally, to intelligence and virtue and manhood, all the way through a living sacrifice of love for the child!

Is not the cradle a Gethsemane? Is not the cradle a Calvary? Not that it is equal to it; not that it is the same in majesty and importance and sanctity; but is there not hidden in, veiled under, these acts and fidelities of the household, a symbol of that everlasting truth which is vaster than nature can express or life can know—



namely, that God is not a tyrant, and does not drink blood, nor let the world drink it; that God hates cruelty; and that all the suffering and sorrow which we see on earth is only on the way to a consummation of everlasting victory and gladness and joy?

I thank God for the testimony of the cross. It dispossesses the heathen notions. It takes out of the heavens the tyranny of a God whom I can not worship, and to whom I can not say, "Thy will be done;" and it puts there a loving Christ, who will use pain and tears and blood, but will use them as medicines—will use them in government for restoration, for education, for elevation, for salvation. Give me that God who is represented by the Lord Jesus Christ. I can bow down and worship him.

O ye that are so conscientious, and so tremulously afraid of idolatry that you go groping in heathen antiquity, with a vague feeling unexpressed, for the Father, the great Almighty; ye who long for that God, will you press away the brightest exemplification, the real and literal embodiment of this everlasting Father—Jesus Christ? Praying for light, praying for knowledge, and having it brought to you in the person of Christ Jesus, who loves, and lives to love, and reigns, and reigns to love, and by love shall subdue all disobedience, and cleanse all sin, and redeem the world to everlasting rapture and glory through righteousness, will you not take that preëminent representation of God—the best that can be given to the human understanding and the human senses; and will you not, with all that are in heaven, and all that yet shall be upon earth, bow the knee, and cry, "Crown him, crown him Lord of all"?

I have no such theological affinities as that I should seek to drive you out of one sect, or into another. All my sympathies in my ministrations are not with the schools and sects, but with the great human family. I belong to living men. I feel for living men. I see their doubts and their difficulties. I see their sorrows and their pains. I have found my way out of them. I have found it at the touch of the Saviour. I have worshiped Christ. I do worship him. I have no fear that there is any jealousy in heaven, and that the Father, the God of all, is angry because I worship Christ. I see many persons who are in bondage through fear of death. I see men that are bound, and that are staggering. Oh! that I could show them God as he is represented in Christ Jesus—the self-sacrificing God; the fatherly God; the God who is represented as giving himself rather than let you destroy yourselves; as taking men's sins, and carrying them in his own experience, rather than that men should suffer. That God who is represented in Christ Jesus is the cure of fear and doubt, and is the very anchor of the soul in all its wanderings and driftings and storm-drivings.

And to you I present this view of Jesus Christ, the loving God, the paternal God. Begin and say, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come"—stop! if you say the next sentence, it is all gone—you are his—"Thy will be done." What! In you? In your reason? In your taste? In your affections? In God's providential counsels for you in the affairs of your family? Stand then, mother, over your little child that lies sick in the cradle, and say, if you can, "Our Father which art in heaven"—then God is your Father, and he loves your child better than you do—"Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come"—now do you dare look down into the face of your little child and say, "Thy will be done," if it is the will of God to take the child?

Look upon your estate, that seems trembling, and about to totter and fall. Look upon your property that seems to take to itself wings and fly away. In my boyish days, in just such weather as this, in old Bethlehem, Connecticut, where I studied Latin by hunting pigeons, I have stood and seen among the young and tender leaves thousands, myriads of pigeons. The trees seemed laden with them. And I see in the city here, rich men, all of whose branches are loaded down with money. At the report of a gun, or the flight of a stone, or a little shout, the pigeons, with a rip and a roar, all rose, and the air was clamorous, as they flew every whither; and in a minute the wood was still, with the exception, perhaps, of the bark of a squirrel. They had taken to themselves wings and flown away. And so the man that yesterday was branch-ful, to-day is branch-less. Every thing is stripped from him, and gone. And can you stand in your barrenness and say, "Thy will be done"?

Between two there has come the shadow and the darkness, and both hearts sorrow, and both yearn. Can you both say, in the sight of final, everlasting separation—in this world, everlasting—"Thy will be done"?

Can you stand in the house of your pride, and say, "Thy will be done"? Is your God such a one that, for the sake of the sweetness in him, for the sake of the beauty in him, for the sake of the joy that you have in him, for the sake of his glorious excellence, you can say of your pride, "God's will be done therein"? Can you say it of your vanity? Can you hush every passion to sleep with the name of God? Can you rock your soul quiet with the name of God? Or have you none? Is your God like a barren field, or a field of stubble, or like straw with the grain threshed out of it? The true God, the Christian's God, the God that faith takes hold of, fills the heaven, fills the earth, fills time, fills providence, fills nature, fills his own soul, and is with him by day and by night, in his rising up and his sitting down; and he can say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? There is none



upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart fail: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever." Have you any such God? Can you trust him? Can you worship him? Can you join with me, and look in the face of Jesus Christ to-day, and say, "Thy will be done"? At that enchantment burdens roll off, cares fly away, darkness lifts, the earth is transformed, events have a new significance, and those experiences that have seemed before to us to be so many persecutions, now begin to letter themselves and form sentences; and every letter and every sentence begins to be a literature interpreting the goodness, the mercy, and glory of God to us.

I beseech of you, turn not away from such a blessed God as that. Accept the privilege and bounty and unspeakable joy of saying, "Thy will be done."

---

### PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

OUR fathers' God, we bless thee for the knowledge, and for the comfort which we have had in the knowledge, of thee; for all the instructions of our childhood; for the hopes which have clustered round about thy name; for the sacred inspirations which have given earnestness and purpose to our lives; for that secret strength by which we have borne burdens and trials. We thank thee for the enlarging bounds of truth. No longer do we think ourselves creatures of this world alone, which is but a nest. Here we learn to fly, and fly away from the world where we were born. Here we are, that we may be trained. But then our life is to be hid in the Invisible; and there these rude powers are to have their full scope. We are learning here to love; and there we shall have the society of those that are worthy of love. Here we are trying our paces. Here we are practicing each faculty and disposition. There, where thou art, like children come home from school, we shall have the liberty and blessedness of the joy and intelligence of the Father's house.

We thank thee for these truths, and we thank thee that they grow clearer to us, and unspeakably more precious, as time passes on, as the world is growing old to so many of us. As we behold the far horizon drawing near, and the sun plunging to set, we rejoice that there lies beyond the sun a clime whose light is God—that has no days, no revolutions of years and seasons, no winter, and no want—high, cloudless, blessed, and eternal. Its foundations are sure. Into it shall enter nothing that defiles. From it shall be purged out and away all that is uncleanly. Thou thyself art there. There art thou, bringing from everywhere sons and daughters. We rejoice that into that blessed abode, how long soever their pilgrimage, so many weary thousands shall enter, as countless numbers have entered. We rejoice to-day to think of all our own that have gone forth from us, and are there. As birds flying from the inclement winter to the land of the South, our children have gone, that sung in the boughs with us, and now sing no more. And yet are not they with thee in the summer land, where

thou dost bring so many that seemed too good for this world—too good for our care and keeping? And there are many garnered who taught us, and led us by the hand. They are at rest from the care, from the battle, from the storm, from the temptation, from the weight of years. The burdens are taken from them, and they are with thee, safely housed in heaven. And there are companions that walked with us, and held sweet counsel with us, and have performed with us the thousand commingled labors of thought, and love, and assiduity, the various duties of life, separated only in form from us, still ours more than ever, but at rest in the unwearied land, where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest, and pain, and sorrow, and tears, and crying, are gone forever.

O Lord, our God! we draw near to the border of that land—the spring-land—this morning, to quicken our hope and our faith. Is it there? Is it waiting? Are we known there? Is our name called? Dost thou, O Lord Jesus Christ! long for us? Art thou as we are when our children are away? Dost thou prepare a place? Art thou gone before only because that is home, that where thou art we may by and by be also? Give us this faith, and there can be no more darkness, and no more trouble. Let us be so joined to thee that we shall feel that thou canst not bear separation; that it is not our helplessness that is hanging on thy breast alone, but that it is the want of thine heart that craves us; and that love in thee is like love in us on earth, and craves its beloved evermore. Oh! give to us this faith of thyself, and then what can harm us? With thy love how can we be poor? With the divine love how can we ever be solitary? How can we be bereaved? It is compensation for all inequality. It is the substitute of all earthly joy. It is the blessedness of every estate or experience. Come joy or come sorrow, come light or come darkness, give thine own self to us, with the sweet ministration of thy love, and we are able to bear all things. But without thee we can do nothing. Then there is solitariness, indeed, of heart. Woe to those that are in great sorrow, and have no God, no sanctuary of love, none that can take them up higher than their own fretting thoughts, and hush them to rest as a mother her babe upon her breast. Woe be to those that are without God, and without hope in this world!

Draw near, we beseech of thee, thou most merciful One, this morning, and grant to all in thy presence a deep sense of their need, and of the plenitude of blessing which they have in thee, if they would but accept thee. Reveal thyself to them as their best Friend—their Father, and their Almighty Lover. May none be afraid. May none seek to hide themselves. May every one have grace to approach the throne of grace, to obtain mercy and help in time of need, Forgive every one his sins. Cast light upon the way which each one has to walk. May every one hear the voice of God from day to day, saying to him, "This is the way; walk ye in it."

We beseech of thee, O Lord our God! that thou wilt prepare each and every one in thy presence, for the events of thy government in providence. Grant that we may be able to say, in all circumstances, "Thy will, Lord, be done." May we seek more and more to conform all our thoughts, and feelings, and plans to thy divine and beneficent will.

Grant, we pray thee, that those who are in affliction may be greatly sustained and comforted. In the hour of their darkness may they accept the angel of the Lord. May he be by them to lift upon them, perpetually, the light of thy countenance. And we pray that in surprise, and dismay, and overwhelming confusion, and anguish of spirit, thy still small voice may be heard, consoling and comforting. And grant, we beseech of thee, as we behold others that are cast, as with



rude shocks into adversity, that we may ask whether we, too, are prepared to follow the Lord through tribulation and through sorrow. May we gird up our loins. May we be prepared for whatever event thy providence has for us. May we seek to fulfill thy will, not trying to find all our happiness here, and to get our portion in this world. Evermore may we look away to the other land, to the better clime, to the Father's house above. There our portion is, and there may we have faith to believe that it is, and live as strangers and pilgrims, seeking another and a better country.

Bless, we beseech of thee, all for whom we should pray. Remember the poor, the outcast, the ignorant, the vicious and the criminal. We beseech of thee that thou wilt reform all those that are given over to wickedness. Raise up friends for the friendless. Grant that the poor and needy may have benefactors that shall seek them out. And we beseech of thee that thou wilt teach every one of us to esteem every man our brother, and to make the welfare of others also a part of our own welfare.

We pray that thou wilt bless thy churches everywhere. May all that preach the Gospel, however divided among themselves, still have power given them from on high to preach Christ, the sinner's hope and the Christian's comfort. We pray that thy churches may be more and more drawn together by the things in which they agree, and less and less repelled by malign passions. Less and less may pride and selfishness teach men how to use differences as swords and spears of war. And we pray that thou wilt join thy people in common labors of philanthropy, and in the common work of education. Everywhere may men begin to see, eye to eye, and no longer be divided by those hateful contentions that have filled the world with confusion and bitterness. Unite thy people everywhere, and pour abroad throughout the land the light of intelligence and true virtue and piety. May the nations of the earth see thy light dawning in the east for them. May all those that are struggling for their rights of manhood be by thy good providence made victorious. We beseech of thee that the time may come when no man shall be strong enough to oppress them. And we pray that the liberties of the people may be known to be hid in their intelligence and their true virtue.

Let thy kingdom come everywhere. Let thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And to thy name shall be the praise, Father, Son and Spirit, evermore. *Amen.*

---

### PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON.

O THOU God of time and of eternity! how infinitely safe are we who put our trust in thee. We scarcely care to look forward, or to know what is before us, we are so confident that thou art infinitely good and loving and merciful. All that we have in us of goodness; all the shrinking away from cruelty; all the hatred of impurity; all the indignation that we have at injustice; all the abhorrence with which we look upon the animal developments of life—all these are but interpreting to us thy greater nature. We feel them a little, though as the ocean rolls, deeper, broader, illimitable, infinite. O thou boundless Goodness! O thou infinite Grace! O thou Sweetness and Tenderness past human language or thought! why

should the heart go vagrant, wandering, orphaned and forlorn, when thou art near to it to teach the sorrowful to comfort their sorrows in the bosom of God, to teach the unhappy to look up and say *Father*. And, through that blessed word, flying from their lips as from an angel's, bring them into the obedience, the faith, the love, and the trust of that Father who will not leave them nor forsake them all the days of their life. And finally bring us all where clouds, and doubts, and darkness, and fear, and temptation, and sin, and anguish therefor, are passed away as a dream, into that bright land of purity and joy, where we will praise thee forever and forever. *Amen.*

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